

this administration; it is a measure of their failure.

Back in April, my colleague the Democratic leader heaped praise on what he called President Biden's "careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date." Does he stand by this lavish praise for a careful and thought-out plan? Crickets. Was it wise to conduct our retreat during the height of the fighting season? Was it sound strategy to preemptively abandon the strategic Bagram Air Base in the middle of the night without telling our partners? Was it careful and prudent to tie our departure to the 20th anniversary of September 11?

Our botched retreat from a so-called endless war cost more American lives than nearly the prior 2 years combined. And make no mistake, the war against terror hasn't ended—far, far from it. In a rare moment of candor, the Biden administration's own experts have admitted explicitly that we will face new terrorist threats from inside Afghanistan sooner rather than later. We will have to face a more entrenched and emboldened enemy with fewer resources, fewer friends, and more constraints.

So virtually every reason and advantage that President Biden said this policy would bring about has already proven absolutely false.

The administration said leaving Afghanistan would let us focus more resources on China, but its catastrophic retreat has tied up even more resources, including strategic naval assets from the Indo-Pacific. And while the administration's officials are consumed—consumed—with this catastrophe, China is cultivating deeper ties with the Taliban.

The administration told us our military and intelligence community could keep terrorists at bay with over-the-horizon capabilities, but longer distances, fewer assets, and less intelligence are already taking their toll, and innocent civilians appear to be paying the price.

Even still, the White House continues to peddle misleading comparisons with operations in other theaters, ignoring the unique challenges of keeping close eyes on a landlocked country with a hostile government thousands of miles from U.S. bases.

Administration officials like to say there is no imminent threat posed by al-Qaida emanating from Afghanistan. But their abandonment of Afghanistan has already allowed that threat to grow, and we will have fewer resources with which to confront the gathering threat. According to press reporting, just this very morning, the Deputy Director of the CIA has acknowledged they are seeing al-Qaida terrorists flowing back—back—into Afghanistan, and our intelligence capabilities are already diminished.

But there is a larger pattern of broken promises. The President said that everyone who wanted to get out would be able to do so, that we would leave no

one behind. Instead, we left Americans and vulnerable Afghans behind.

Secretary Blinken said the Taliban committed to allow Americans and vulnerable Afghans safe passage to the airport. Instead, we know Americans and Afghans were prevented from getting to the airport. Many still cannot leave.

The administration said that we would have tremendous leverage over the Taliban, that they would need international recognition and funding. Yet the Taliban doesn't seem to be terribly concerned with global PR.

The administration said they would hold the Taliban accountable. They haven't.

The administration seems to believe the Taliban would establish an inclusive and representational government. Look, we are talking about a government of medieval theocrats—medieval theocrats—the same killers, kidnapers, and hostage-takers who aided and abetted the terrorist architects of 9/11.

Well, their government is, however, inclusive in one way. It is inclusive in one way. Listen to this. It includes four—four—of the Guantanamo Bay terrorists released by President Obama in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl; four people who were at GTMO, exchanged for Bowe Bergdahl. And that is only part of the government. It also includes a senior Haqqani terrorist with a \$5 million bounty on his head and American blood on his hands—another top official in the government. This is not a government that cares about staying in the good graces of the so-called international community.

Enough fluff. Enough spin. It is time for hard truths and accountability. The Biden administration's conduct over the past several months demands thorough instigation by the Senate. That will begin with Secretary Blinken's hearing at the Foreign Relations Committee today. I hope the Secretary and the administration he represents are prepared to answer some tough questions about past decisions, as well as future plans. The American people and the vulnerable partners we have left behind deserve nothing less.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in just a moment, I want to talk a little bit about the situation in Afghanistan. But before I do that, I just wanted to speak to something that the majority leader said earlier regarding some of the upcoming business that we have to deal with this fall.

We have a whole series of deadlines in front of us. The fiscal year ends on September 30, meaning that we have to at some point fund the government, which presumably would be in the form of a continuing resolution. We are told that the House of Representatives, when they move that and send it over here, will include a debt-limit increase.

The debt limit does run out, and we will hit that at some point. There are varying estimates of when exactly that would be—some say as early as mid-October; some say perhaps mid-November—but inevitably that will be upon us. There has been a discussion here about how that ought to be lifted and who ought to deliver the votes to get that done.

I just want to make the point that the majority leader, as he was down here making his remarks earlier, indicated that this was all debt that was accumulated during the previous administration. Certainly there was some debt because, obviously, during the coronavirus pandemic, all of us responded in a very bipartisan way. Most of the debt was at that point in time. It was the votes that we made in March of 2020 and subsequently to that.

Of course, there was another \$2 trillion earlier this year in February, which no Republican voted for—that was all Democratic votes—most of which had nothing to do with the virus; most of which had to do with other elements of their agenda, including expanding the government.

But, nevertheless, when the debt limit hit its expiration at the end of July, it reset, and it covered everything up until that point. What we are talking about now is raising the debt limit to accommodate trillions and trillions of new spending proposed by the Democrats here in Washington and by the President and his administration.

It strikes me, at least, that that being the case, if the Democrats on their own, without a single Republican vote—and there won't be any Republican votes for the \$3½ trillion bill they are talking about, which the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says really isn't \$3½ trillion; it is \$5½ trillion—\$5½ trillion of new spending, massive expansion of the government, financed some with tax increases but inevitably some with adding to the debt—that it would make sense, since the Democrats are going to do that through reconciliation, which is a purely partisan exercise, with only their votes, that it could accommodate